

## **‘BEAUTY PAGEANT FOR MEN IN THE ACCURSED MOUNTAINS’ (1999) SYMBOLIC INTERPRETATION: DRESS IN GENDERS’**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In this essay I will analyze Kadare’s novel, this time to Beauty Pageant for Men in the Accursed Mountains (Konkurs bukurie për burrat në Bjeshkët e Namuna) (1999), a novel dealing with homosexual issues. I will consider what changes might have occurred in the ways in which this prominent author portrays gender identity, and what this might suggest about the strength and status of the homosexual orthodoxy as the Albanian society wears on. Looking at Kadare’s story has illustrated how he came to earn a reputation as a sympathetic chronicler of gender identities, and how he can be identified as a writer who notably subverts and challenges the dynamics of cultural memory. Looking here at the shorter novelistic form of Beauty Pageant for Men in The Accursed Mountains will provide opportunity to explore in greater depth the complexity and ambivalence that underpins his concern with homosexuality.*

*Ismail Kadare has progressed closer to the zone of the dangerous moral taboo in many of his works. Homosexuality in Life, Games and Death of Lul Mazreku (Jeta, loja dhe vdekja e Lul Mazrekut) (2002) and the ‘freezing of the erotic message’ in the love affair of an unsuccessful filmmaker with his ‘stranger’ lover in the novel Shadow: Notes of a Failed Filmmaker (Hija: shënime të një kineasti të dështuar) (2003), add wealth to the characters who are usually avoided. In Chronicles in Stone, (Kronikë në gur) (1971) researchers have found ‘pre-historic sexuality’ (Pipa, 1991: 67). One of the reasons why Who brought Doruntine (Kush e solli Doruntinën) (1979) was judged mercilessly was the mention of incest, as a likely event of the ballad. The Broadway boys in The Winter of Great Loneliness (Dimri i vetmisë së madhe) (1977) are presented as the expected pollution of youth by the bourgeois impact. In fact, if we refer to Foucault’s ‘the question of pathology’, the characters of Ismail Kadare are not ill people with moral abnormality, but spiritual beings, that pursuit an elementary right to perform (Foucault, 1990: 295).*

*Also, I want to show that Kadare’s particular type of stylistic excess helps him to explore and exploit cultural memory devices and ideas of fixed identity, gender stereotypes, and linguistic referentiality and thus challenge the concept that ‘nature’ is not a social construct like ‘culture’.*

*Keywords: Gender identity, cross cultural dressing, symbolic interpretation, and transient gender attachments.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In *Beauty Pageant for Men in The Accursed Mountains* everything is ambivalent: its characters, their genders, its reception, and even clothing’s introduction in support of the theme. Written in 1996, the novel explores the complex thoughts of the ‘homosexual’, a ‘damun’ (damned), and thus, the landscape of its night becomes the ideal place for all those whom society designates as subject and obscene and in ‘the Canon homosexuals are sentenced with death’ (Kadare, 1999: 122).

Set in Northern Albania during the late 1936, *Beauty Pageant for Men in The Accursed Mountains*’ brief plot is based around the love of homosexual Gaspër Cara, a young boy from capital city of Albania who was punished for a murder he did not commit. Gaspër Cara had fallen in love with the

Prenk Curri, *Prince of Beauty* (Princi i Bukurisë), who was the winner of the Beauty Pageant, and for this reason he had been accused of his murder. Gaspër Cara was interested about the beauty pageant since first hearing about it, and was under the impression that this pageant would be linked 'with people like him' (Kadare, 1999: 119). Upon first seeing Prenk Curri, Gaspër Cara becomes obsessed with him, and follows him on the day of his death.

In Ismail Kadare's *Beauty Pageant for Men in The Accursed Mountains* all the characters challenge a shared cultural view on gender and sexuality. Kadare develops an in-between ground of gender, diversified by homosexual identifications. His character Gaspër desires the most fleeting and fugitive of figures: Prenk Curri who, enters into his thoughts, taking the form of a lover. Driven by dark forces and anarchic desires to become the most beautiful man the true killer of Prenk Curri had paid an assassin to do the dirty work. However until the true facts come to light the Canon hides the killer. Prenk Curri had been in blood feud and the Canon demanded that a member of the other family had to take revenge by killing him. As a result, as well as Gaspër Cara, the members of the feuding family were other suspects of the murder.

Gaspër Cara's black cloak, (pelerinë e zezë) and his white scarf which were 'of the latest fashion' are shown in contrast to the clothing of the two waiters in café Kursal and the doctor, to whom he had confessed everything. Further, Gaspër Cara's conversation with one of the waiters at the beginning of the story, and the mocking look of the other waiter, gives more meaning to Gaspër Cara's different appearance.

The fact that the doctor is wearing a Borsalino hat and smoking a pipe, together with his mannerism show that he is upper class and that he studied abroad. His Western culture is apparent not only in his clothing, but also in his desire to help Gaspër Cara and the sympathy that he feels for Gaspër Cara's plight. This is highlighted by the fact that the doctor gives Gaspër, Oscar Wilde's book *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* to read.

*Beauty Pageant for Men in The Accursed Mountains* is a story that continuously undermines for categorisation with its stylistic tactics of excess linguistic overabundance, excess, hyperbolic signification, and artificialisation and thus deconstructs the cultural and discursive authority that, in the metaphoric language of the novel's symbol patterns, divides 'day' from 'night', rationally, order and domestically from its non-normative Others: desire, grief, melancholy, dreams and perversity.

The novel's dynamic, always changing and slippery discourse refuses indefinitely the process of naming things, since in Kadare's view there is no stable meaning. The language of overabundance is, paradoxically, a language of insufficiency, lacking a single authoritative truth. Abdi Baleta has also emphasised the notion of stylisation as a subversive weapon against the epistemological claims of realist discourse: '*Beauty Pageant for Men in The Accursed Mountains* is in fact a literary improvisation to create suggestions of the widespread of homosexuality in the Mountainous Regions of Northern Albania. Like literary improvisation, irony is eventually brought back as a transgressive tool: "In fact, Kadare takes much pleasure in ironically redeploing early twentieth-century sexual politics, sometimes through a series of hilarious gender inversions" (Baleta, 1998: 4). According to Baleta, Kadare wants to force the Greek perversities on to Albanians, more specifically those from the north, not his own people from Gjirokastra (who being from southern Albania) were in fact regionally closer (and maybe more exposed) to the ancient Greek homosexuality (Baleta, 1998:4). Marius Chelaru states that reason is an historical connotation when Kadare enters secret code of the "old world", called Canon (Kanun)<sup>1</sup>. For Chelaru the winner of the beauty pageant is one of those who has been hiding for many years in one of the "Kulla" - a building, used by self-isolated men who had to hide since they were involved in a blood feud (Chelaru, 2006: 3). For Chelaru beyond these elements

<sup>1</sup> Canon (Kanun i Lek Dukagjinit / Code of Lekë Dukagjini) (24 chapters, 159 articles, 1263 paragraphs - only 23 refers to blood feud (gjakmarrja)

that come from Albanian mentality and customs, prejudices, makes Gaspër's sufferings worse in a world where homosexuality was considered more than a sin (Chelaru, 2006: 3).

This novel explores the themes of pagan traditions such as "beauty pageants for men", something which 'aroused' desires for homosexuality and which was kept as a tradition in the heart of The Accursed Mountains (Bjeshkët e Namuna) in the Mountainous North, which is a Catholic area. In the novel Kadare states:

*"A Papal bull of the seventeenth century, if I am not mistaken, in which the Pope threatened the Catholics of the region with excommunication if they did not stop their foppishness. Whereas for the men...- You yourself said that Albanian men are vainer than the women..."* (Kadare, 1999:121)

To reflect this in his work, Kadare had to re-form writing itself, changing between signifier to allow for greater ambiguity, ambivalence and breadth of meaning. It is this challenge embodied in his writing that is deserving of deeper consideration in relation to my hypothesis with the focus on cross cultural and fluidity of genders identity.

Indeed, Kadare's text does raise the issue of whether or not a fixed and complete definition of homosexual identity can exist and yet, his endless shifts between text and sex demonstrate that such a definition is almost impossible. By insisting that Gaspër, and in general man, cannot be caught in a category or a simple definition, Kadare seems to anticipate and have affinities with contemporary queer theorists, thus taking a distance from the pseudo empiricist thinkers of his own day. His view that sexual categories displace rather than fix the objects of their study appears to go hand in hand with theories of performativity.

The challenge for the writer is then not to explain away the body or to deny its existence as anything other than a culturally and socially constructed object. The real challenge is to find a way to enlarge our vocabulary to seize the multiplicity and contradiction that characterise the experience of our bodies. Kadare 'expands the field of possibilities, making simple dismissal equally of our bodies' (Sinani, 2008: 4). In *Beauty Pageant for Men in The Accursed Mountains*, he attempts to accept and illuminate this contradiction.

*Beauty Pageant for Men in The Accursed Mountains* is a good example of that the study of cross-dressing still involves some sort of curiosity about the 'true' sex of the cross-dressed performer and this obsession with trying to decipher the ambiguity of transvestite performance is the effect of the late-nineteenth century that advanced through the twentieth century.

In this chapter I argue that *Beauty Pageant for Men in The Accursed Mountains* builds its sensibility on excess, hybridity beyond epistemological categories. By lending his ear and pen to the outsider, Kadare occupies the space opened up by the possibility of all choices existing at once. The option he chooses to dress *Beauty Pageant for Men in The Accursed Mountains* in speeches clotted with tricky metaphors and half-told truths, is not only a critique of systematisation which questions the possibility of an inherent order of things. By overturning Albanian cultural and canonical modes of perception and by establishing connections between supposedly distinct categories, Kadare also forces readers to re-think dualistic conceptions in his attempt to demonstrate, mnemonic devices and gender and its clichés. The radical potential of *Beauty Pageant for Men in The Accursed Mountains* lies in its performance and this chapter looks at Kadare's novel *Beauty Pageant for Men in The Accursed Mountains* and reads its homosexual resistance to being inscribed.

In what follows I dispute that this resistance had a double effect: first, the beginning of the claustral confinement in Albania within sexual categories and secondly, the flourishing of new subjectivities that go beyond the sterile fixities of traditional identities. So, if earlier analyses of transvestism

reduced the practices of cross-dressing to sexuality and clearly-cut sexual categories, later on more performative practices liberated genders, turning to drag and camp for its metaphors.

### **Clothes a Penchant for Transient Gender Attachments**

A thorough examination and reception of *Beauty Pageant for Men in The Accursed Mountains* allows us to see the complexity of its cultural memory threads, the construction and fragmented journey of the text itself. *Beauty Pageant for Men in The Accursed Mountains* had gone through several editing stages before it was published in 1999. The history of *Beauty Pageant for Men in The Accursed Mountains* is a history of a text-body beautifying itself to please the would-be censors: the history of revising and emphasising the best features while the weaker ones for its public presentation.

The extraordinary sophistication of the character's speech makes the task of piecing together a single-thread storyline difficult, although the characters themselves seem to have no trouble traversing the elaborate play of sexual metaphor to arrive at each other's meaning. The text's own internal fragmentation and Kadare's 'deadly introversion', which was 'almost pathological', had a textual manifestation emphasised by Shaban Sinani, whom observation of *Beauty Pageant for Men in The Accursed Mountains* was that, 'In this novel you believe one thing half time, and another – the opposite thing – the other half' (Sinani, 2007: 10).

The mobility of genders through the change of clothing is now taken to another level in the *Beauty Pageant for Men in The Accursed Mountains*, where Prenk Curri becomes 'the adored Prince of Beauty' (Kadare, 1999: 140).

Despite his solitude, there, in Albanian Alps, his journey is yet another metaphor for Gaspër Cara's further transformation: The Accursed Mountains gives Gaspër the opportunity of assuming, rather than merely being, another racial and ethnic identity in another realm of 'becoming'. Costume also enhances the performance of masquerade and carnivalesque, as Gaspër 'wraps himself in a long black cloak' (Kadare, 1999: 138). Again, Kadare moves back and forth between generic expectations and novel diversions teasingly placing the reader in between opposite directions.

While The Accursed Mountains (Bjeshkët e Namuna) is a site of danger and intrigue, it is also strangely alluring. As the gateway to the Montenegro in North, and Kosovo in North East, The Accursed Mountains was seen as exotic, mystical, and deeply sensual. At the same time, The Accursed Mountains was also, in some requests, an Albanian catholic place. For Kadare, this dual geographical and religious link gave The Accursed Mountains a liminal quality transforming the place into a space of multiple metamorphoses. Baleta argues that 'by displacing both sex and gender transformation to the Albanian Alps, Kadare's satiric agenda enables him to invent a fantastic and utopian space for such transformation to occur' (Baleta, 1998: 4). In other words, The Accursed Mountains (Bjeshkët e Namuna) becomes, for Kadare, a site of new sexual possibilities where Kadare plays each impression against the other. In the same way could be seen the desecration of the legend of "*Constantine and Doruntine*" (Konstandini dhe Doruntina) which Kadare has turned from a legend about keeping a promise to a disgusting story about incest, where the brother and sister accused after many centuries by Kadare of incest were not of the Catholic faith or when Kadare interferes in '*Broken April*' with the Canon which Albanians from Catholic regions boasted about.

As a quasi-utopian locus, The Accursed Mountains (Bjeshkët e Namuna) serves Kadare's purposes by virtue of its own shifting. Merging South and North Albania together, yet never fully either, Greek or Serbian, traditional, supportive of the status quo, and transgressive, The Accursed Mountains creates a space in Balkan which allows binaries to emerge and dissipate. As Antonia Young suggests,

*Ismail Kadare has collected together into a magnificent visual study, some of the thousands of studio portraits of Albanians at the turn of the nineteenth century. Kadare's*

*selection includes a plate showing 'Homme vetu d'un costume de femme catholique' (A man dressed in the costume of a Catholic woman) (Young, 2000: 106).*

Here in *The Accursed Mountains* (Bjeshkët e Namuna) where the dominion of Catholic religion and influence of Canon had given a little chance of acceptance for gender and sexuality issues, Gaspër Cara defies Albanian tradition and history by becoming a homosexual. Falling into a weeklong trance, yet another wonderful place of in-betweenness, and, upon waking, Gaspër Cara discovers he 'had fallen in love with Prenk Curri' (Kadare, 1999: 137). Kadare's reluctance to discuss Gaspër's transformation further develops this dynamic. Having already mentioned the numerous gaps in the record of Gaspër's behaviour, Kadare claims that, at the moment of his falling in love, 'In the eyes of the boy's from capital city had prayer, worship, demand, threat and suffering ahead enigmas' (Kadare, 1999: 139). Rather than explain the truth behind this intriguing change, the writer embraces obscurity and the text thus begins to slip beyond control of the writer and imaginary censor.

Also the implications of the carnivalesque body as a culturally productive entity that transgresses its own limits seem relevant in relation to Gaspër's metamorphosis from man with enigma to a man in love with another man in *The Accursed Mountains*. Kadare writes Gaspër's inconspicuousness as a site of transformation, process and knowledge, exemplifying Foucault's idea that 'a 'knowledge' of the body that is not exactly the science of its functioning, and a mastery of its forces that is more than the ability to conquer them (Foucault, 1995: 26). Following Foucaultian idea of the body Laura Hengehold in her study *The Body Problematic: Political Imagination in Kant and Foucault* called this body inconspicuousness as 'body in pain' (Hengehold, 2010: 75).

Marjorie Garber also notes that in fiction sexual identity and sexual changes 'are marked not only by changes in the body but by changes in dress' (Garber, 1997: 116). *The Accursed Mountains* thus becomes the location of foppishness and theatrical space which reinforces Kadare's astute anticipation of the invented nature of gendered identity as a 'performative act' (Butler, 1993: 107). By displacing city gender transformations to the rural and mountain area, Kadare's subversively re-invents a utopian fluid space for such transformation to occur.

Since Gaspër Cara's identity does not change in the same manner as his sexual desire changes, he is willingly 'compelled' to put on beautiful and fashion clothes that ascribe gendered expectations to neither sex, but which instead allow him to take new lines of flight: 'those beautiful dresses' which can be worn by people of mountain regions (Kadare, 1999: 120). While Gaspër depicts the capital city as having rigidly gendered assumptions incongruous with Gaspër's fluid gendered self, he portrays the people of mountain regions, with their gender-neutral clothing, as also a successfully gendered culture. John MacMurray's assumption completes that 'the form of organisms and material object in opposition or in support – necessitates a difference in our own behaviour' (Mac Murray, 1953: 117). For Mac Murray, 'when we distinguish between persons and material things, the characteristics we attribute to things are a selection from the characteristics we attribute to a person' (Mac Murray, 1953: 117).

Among the androgynous men on the '*tokrendë*' Gaspër Cara had scarcely given his sex a thought because the people in this pageant beauty surrounded by mountains, except the Prince of Beauty, (Prenk Curri) differ very little from each other. The mountain culture, a culture of people in *The Accursed Mountains* (Bjeshkët e Namuna), does not differentiate between its men and acknowledges some very traditional cultural devices fluid identities by allowing them to wear clothing that does not specify their biological sex because of their foppishness.

Kadare uses of the word '*tokrendë*' instead of the original word *competition* (konkurs) gives another cross cultural sense. The history of the word *tokrendë* is, on the whole, closely parallel to that of *running together*, which originates from the Turkish word *rekabet* from the period of Ottoman Empire where a man has to fight in wrestling or running sports to be considered as winner of the special prize. It is a contracted pronunciation of the Albanian words '*tok*' (together) and '*rend*' (running), which

had long historical connection with the beauty competitions in Albania. In this instance it has happened that one of the older words of Albanian language for rivalry, '*konkurs*' has been almost entirely superseded by Kadare with a synonym that introduces more clearly the meaning. The word originally meant *rivalry*.

By conflating both male and female sexual thoughts within Gaspër, Kadare suggests that one's gendered identity is not determined by biological sex but is independent of the gender labels society seeks to impose on its subjects. Remarkably, Gaspër is not particularly surprised or perturbed by his transformation.

In our attempt to distinguish different points of view about clothing and identity between male in normal life and male as homosexuals, Sandra M. Gilbert's 'ghostly blank' can be seen as potential. She writes: 'extraordinary costume is in one sense a kind of ghostly blank, an empty page' (Gilbert, 2011: 145). It fits with Kevin K. Kumashiro's idea of 'the multiple identity disorder'. Kumashiro explores that different community uses 'fashion as a means to assert their queer identity' (Kumashiro, 2004: 34). Kadare's *Beauty Pageant for Men in The Accursed Mountains* demystifies a prescribed 'cultural paradigm' and demonstrates a more flexible and changeable paradigm (Hurewitz, 2007: 66). The cross-dressing guarantees Gaspër multi-identities changing with the costumes of different occasions. Like the ambiguous or shifting textual form, Gaspër's ambiguous sexual identity helps him and the text itself resist definition and control, categorisation and claustrophobia, by any power relation or any given cultural paradigm.

### From Gender and Identity Interpretation to Gender and Identity Performance

As Gaspër begins to feel more liberated in his way to the pageant, he reflects on his previous complicity within bureaucracy of gender that now oppresses him: 'another person, who maybe more anxiously, (it was an anxiety which mixed his hope and his previous sadness of an impossible dream), searched to find the secret meaning of the festival, was the boy from the capital city: Gaspër Cara' (Kadare, 1999: 137). When he is described in the mountain village Kadare expresses 'Having come with the journalists of the newspaper Time of Albania, he drew attention from those present, with his black cloak and scarf white as the snow which was tied differently' (Kadare, 1999: 137). Of course he now realises that he is important to be in his gender performance 'when it was windy around him, his cloak would fly up slowly, giving his walk, that different look, which looked similar to the unnatural walk of the Princes who had come from the shadow whose knees had not yet strengthened after the long walk in half-dark' (Kadare, 1999: 138). Kadare uses this passage to figuratively describe the 'homosexual' performativity. The word '*mbipetku*' is used to perform more in enhancing the meaning of Gaspër's gender identity. The word is formed from two composites, the prefix '*mbi*' (upon, over, above) and the word of clothing '*petku*' (outer garment). This word which is back-formation of Albanian word '*veshje e sipërme*' (over-dress), is used by Kadare as a synonym of '*black cloak*' to increase its power in the meaning of the theme<sup>2</sup>.

According to Butler, the tacit collective agreement to perform and produce ambiguous genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions – and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe them; the construction 'compels' our belief in its necessity and naturalness (Butler, 1999: 178). Kadare enables Gaspër, as well as the reader, to see the sign system as a natural sign system.

Yet, because these marks of homosexuality do not come naturally for Gaspër, he must work hard to fabricate them and 'can only attain these graces ... by the most careful behaviour' (Kadare, 1999: 126). Since the different clothes have 'much to do with' the ambiguity of Gaspër's sex, Gaspër also becomes a little modest, as gays are, of his brains, and a little more vain, as gays are, of his person

<sup>2</sup> See *Oxford Albanian – English Dictionary* (1990) Oxford: Oxford University Press. P. 639.

(Kadare, 1999: 138). Kadare describes this in detail when gives Gaspër's waking, dressing and behaving and realises how unrealistic Gaspër's earlier expectations of pageant's graces truly were.

As Gaspër discard arbitrary limitations, Paul Rosenfels is right when notes that homosexuals 'discover sources of sexual attractions which come from the psychological femininity and masculinity that they bring to each other' (Rosenfels, 1986: 86). So according to Rosenfels the dual psychological senses attain is not a simple product of schooling and studied artifice. Anatomy is not destiny (as the reader subversively understands from doctor's conversation with Gaspër about not having a proper clinic) but a self-conscious rhetorical and parodic play, whose real intention is to challenge the reductive essentialism which limit gay's cultural and sexual potential.

The doubly senses as both man and woman places Gaspër in the ideal position to critically reflect on the gender roles required by society because he knows how incompletely those reflect the desires of the traversing gender. Seeking to escape the bureaucracy of gender Gaspër plays with the rules that create it in order to claim his own gendered meanings while also embracing ambiguity. Gaspër performs that part either gender by means of clothes yet silently identified by either of them: 'the doctor spotted his black cloak' (Kadare, 1999: 151). However Gaspër now can be identified not simply only from his dress, but also from 'the grim shadow of a death which took place far away' (ibid). This grim shadow is an attempt to serve as metaphor that links three different cultural devices to connote this gendered system. At first is Gaspër's time in prison, the second the book that doctor gave to him to read in their first contact, Oscar Wilde's book *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, and last the red gillyflower who serves as a double metaphor of the death of Prince of Beauty.

In his juncture Gaspër's black cloak is still dominated symbolic devise that implies a new interpretation of the death. The death that is evoked from the beginning of the story, when the doctor expresses silently to himself: 'with this clothing you [Gaspër] provoke death' (Kadare, 1999: 118). The death that is meaningful after the killing of the Prince of Beauty. The death that in any symbolic interpretation is linked with the Canon: 'do not forget that in these regions the same-sex love, homosexuality, as it is expressed in the Canon, is still punishable with death' (Kadare, 1999: 122).

Gaspër's biological sex is certain, but his gender is not, because he refuses to assume the cultural role required of him. Kadare's enemy seems to be not sex but unity of cultural traditions. That multiple cultural dominations linked with Gaspër's chiaroscuro can be adopted, decoded and interpreted metaphors of Kadare's tactics of destabilisation and denaturalisation of a single gender.

In *Beauty Pageant for Men in The Accursed Mountains* sign, signification, writing, sexuality, canonical rules, and clothing are all interlaced. For Foucault 'it's not a problem of fantasy; it's a problem of verbalisation' (Foucault, 1990: 8). As the writer relates, for Gaspër's future perspective 'maybe I may even get the feeling that this whisper might have awoken in you. Tidings, a sign maybe... In other words a ray of hope for you... I mean... If not acceptance, a softening in attitude towards you' (Kadare, 1999: 121). Kadare expands the boundaries of literary representation and the representation of genders through this process of 'signification' to create a different gendered texture which surreptitiously challenges and even subverts dominant canonical power structures.

This embryonic material is made obvious during the act of reading when seized upon by an informed, concerned reader. This process of finding clues, deciphering them, and completing the text, together with the weight Kadare puts on process, bring the reader and writer together in what Reading refers to as an act of 'understanding': 'to understand, the reader must seek to enter with the writer the world of the deep memory' (Reading, 2002: 54). For Rothberg 'the framework of memory function something like language' (Rothberg, 2009: 15). This act exceeds the boundaries of demanding systems, replacing their rigidity and passivity with a more collaborative cultural dynamic and a journey together. Both textual and sexual encounters allow the other to play a role in 'completing the self' and in weaving the text (Argyle, 1967: 28).

Also, '*signification*', a word so dear to Kadare's project, helps us understand how the gendered body is constructed. Gaspër's narrator (the writer himself) despairs that the self is 'damun'. The world itself sounds similar to the word 'namuna' which is part of the name of the mountainous region (Bjeshkët e Namuna). In fact the two words have the same root, from the Latin 'damné', and similar meaning. This is like when the doctor expresses in the novel: 'somewhere I have read that even the worlds 'djalë' (boy) and 'djall' (devil) have the same roots' (Kadare, 1999: 122). Various signs form the hybrid texture of the gendered body. Indeed, as Butler would also later observe 'gendered bodies...are so many "styles of the flesh"', 'but these are never fully self-styled, for styles have a history and those histories condition and limit the possibilities' (Butler, 1999: 177).

It is eventually Gaspër's awareness of his new own performance of a role and pleasure in look that allows him to reclaim his life from limiting cultural expectations. Although the clothes control Gaspër as he adjusts to dual sexualities, he is well aware that he is the one who chooses them. Louis Diamant describes homosexual's cross-dressing as 'having obvious feminine mannerisms, speech, and clothing' (Diamant, 1993: 147). Gaspër can move from one gender role to another precisely because he perceives himself in between the gendered lens of his culture.

Although with feminine mannerism, Gaspër has no hesitation in pulling on a man's black cloak and white silk scarf, items that allow him to go roving about the countryside with the same freedom of movement a man experiences in his nightly wanderings. On a different occasion, Gaspër, dressed in a man's black cloak walks the streets of the village in mountain 'as the figure of a prince' (Kadare, 1999: 137). Because he dresses differently, he seems almost to become one. In Gaspër's case clothing functions both as a symbol of personal agency and as a prop in an elaborate play of foppishness and culturally-constructed gender roles.

Because Gaspër uses clothing to navigate both masculine and feminine roles, Aldo Poiani's concept of 'feminized male homosexual' puts a strain on conventional language and thinking (Glaser, 2006: 32). Gaspër's fluid movement between male and female in clothing and sexual attraction emphasises his subjectivity beyond certain gender while proving that 'the level of cross-cultural variability is significant' (Glaser, 2006: 40).

What Kadare seems to attack, is the need to conform to any fixed identity. While Kadare plays with different representations and historical facts of genders, the novel also suggests the extent to which these representations are always subject to constant change and revision. By showing that sexual instinct can altered or, more precisely, 'perverted'. Kadare implies that gender may be dynamic, engaged in an on-going process of change.

Moreover, Kadare implies that the incredible sense of sympathy between gender interpretations stems from their similarly mixed constitutions. At one point, Gaspër and his lover, Prenk Curri, are simultaneously struck by the notion that they have been connected to the unpredicted world. Gaspër is convinced that he is a man to be loved by a man.

The question is raised once again since the sympathy is a reason for what's happened mystically in the novel. With the plurality and instability of Gaspër's relationship, both glory in same sex relations, the blurring of category, the options that extend beyond cultural properties.

### **The novel and the situation in Albania**

Since its publication has mapped out the essential ideas of homosexual problem. Rather than parroting essentialist gender stereotypes, the homosexual mind blends masculine duality elements to create a unique perspective. In fact, the homosexual mind is fundamentally imaginative, in a continuous state of patriarchal society; since the homosexuality cannot accept a world divided along strict gendered lines, he must rethink reality. Kadare opts for a free and far-ranging orientation in which one is capable of effortless transitions.

By revisioning the interplay between clothes and gender roles, Kadare's novel concludes that a person's subjectivity travels beyond a binary system of gender and sex. Clothes may indeed reinforce gender norms, but they can also offer a path towards a genderless idea. By reclaiming the privilege of gender choice, Kadare refuses to fix identity and leaves the matter of gender open ended. The writer refuses to resolve the duality of genders exploiting them instead as a site of matter under attack from different points of view, as Canon, religious and patriarchal society interfering.

Moreover Kadare himself refused to discuss the novel in political or gendered terms, and he silently rebuked critics who persisted in reading *Beauty Pageant for Men in The Accursed Mountains* as a homosexual work (Baleta, 1998: 4). *Beauty Pageant for Men in The Accursed Mountains* follows Gaspër in his circular movement that shows him to first appear, and then finally disappear at the borderline between the primitive and the historical. In this juxtaposition of Gaspër's circular movement and the mythic even Gaspër's name and surname provokes. Margaret Rose on her study *Baby Names for Dummies* states that Gaspar is one of the Medieval tradition names, 'the Biblical "three wise man" as Caspar, Balthazar and Melchior' (Rose, 2005: 98). For Rose 'Caspar in turn became Gaspar and Jasper' (ibid). According to thinkbabynames, Gaspër's name which suggests a man with catholic religion, its meaning and name origin Gaspar \g(a)-sper, gas-per\ as a boy's name is a variant of Caspar (Persian), Gaspar and Jasper (Greek), and the meaning of Gaspar is "treasurer". However Gaspër's surname 'Cara' \c(a)-ra, which advocates as a girl's name, is pronounced *cara*. It is of Latin, origin, and the meaning of *cara* is "*beloved; friend*". According to thinkbabynames it is 20th-century coinage and feminine form of the Latin and Italian word for "*dear*". Kadare's use of Gaspër's name and surname is also indicative of his hybrid, ambiguous body, and both male and female, boyish/girlish. He stands for a mutant of identity categories, gendered norms, and sexual desires while moving between points of reference.

Constantly on his dream to find his 'Prince of Beauty' in the beauty competition, Kadare constructs Gaspër as an intermediate ground between the canonical and the natural, disrupting these processes, and any effort of attempting indications.

Kadare catches his hybrid being, his metamorphosis and transgressions through an excess of imagistic representation. Every time the reader comes close to finding out something central about him, Kadare loses in yet another extended space of a metaphor.

Kadare's subjectivity in *Beauty Pageant for Men in The Accursed Mountains* camouflaged chameleonic subjectivity allows readers to identify with Gaspër's characterisation of gendered subjectivity variously. Thus, never settling down into the conventions of any given society, and remaining suspended between genders, Gaspër can choose the gender sex that serves his interest best, depending on the newly evolving context. By playing with gender conventions, pragmatic Gaspër converts them into matter of dynamic role-playing while also breaking them down. As a travelling subject with an ever-changing identity, Gaspër and *Beauty Pageant for Men in The Accursed Mountains* will change with different surroundings. Always in the making and re-marking, Gaspër and *Beauty Pageant for Men in The Accursed Mountains* is capable of embodying different interpretations and implications as a utopian space of eternal fabrication, becoming and alteration.

The Austrian academic, Johann Georg von Hahn, in *Albanian Studies* (Albanesische Studien) (1854), revealed undeniable facts that homosexuality existed in Albania at the time. According to him, this could have been seen in folk songs, appearance and clothing. He cites a lot of evidence which was taken from the Northern regions of Albania, where the gheg dialect is spoken, that reveal the existence of 'love between boys' (Hahn, 1854: 166).

However homosexuality in Albanian traditional culture was signified as a 'disaster'. According to Dervishi, all folk tales of Albanian folk tradition have been connoted with the paradigm as 'sources of individual disaster' (Dervishi, 2008: 137 & 186). Dervishi explains that homosexuality was a reproduction with symbolic language formed with the colour 'all black' (krejt të zeza). Traditionally

the signification of the colour 'black' in Albanian culture is linked with death. In this occasion it shows that homosexuality was considered as improper in Albanian culture and was measured same as death. The sources published in 1944 in the journal '*Bleta*' (Bee), (even though it does not address the issues of homosexuals directly) explains in a very close sense a clear understanding that 'in Albanian legends and orally passed down tales, the colour black, is covered in thick mysterious clouds and simultaneously treated as a mystery which is a source of mystery over many generations' (Morana, 1944: 13).

In *The Great Pashalics* ("Pashallëqet e Mëdha") (1989), Kadare uses the colour black as a link to the bad created by the *ferexhe*, a theme which was looked into in chapter IV. In his hatred of Tunxh Hatai (the messenger of the Ottoman Empire), Kadare clearly states:

'...the snow should have been black like the women's *ferexhe*, because after all, the earth is nothing but a woman who conceives. An old whore, he nearly said out loud. It wasn't a coincidence that the high officials were as obsessed with it as they were with women.' (Kadare, 1989: 50).

In the Bible, the black colour signifies sin, disaster, hell. In Western cultural society with Christian indication 'mourning' for disasters and deaths expresses with wearing of the symbolic black clothing. Differently from this tradition, in some places in Albanian, the sorrow of society for the dead was expressed by wearing white colour. This is a close link with some Asian cultures where people believe in that logic 'The dead body converted into a light, raised in its innocence' (Pastoreau, 2004: 17). However in the Christian society the white colour symbolises sanctity and purity and social life. The white colour symbolises the permanent triumph of good over evil, which is symbolised with the black colour. According to the Bible 'The light continues to shine darkness and the darkness has never put out (Bible, 97).

Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha announced on 29 July 2009 that his party will propose a law legalising same-sex marriage. For three days all the written media was focused on the issue, and stigmatised the government and all homosexuals in Albania. Also some Albanian TV channels broadcasted news concerning this issue several times. The National Public TV also organised direct interviews with the wide public, asking them if it is a good or bad to be homosexual and if it has to be legal or illegal<sup>3</sup>. Mostly all the information introduced by different medias was provided by the police department; only in a few cases did the journalists express their opinion concerning the issue. Mark Lowen, BBC Balkans correspondent wrote:

*"It is an unexpected move in a country that is still one of the most conservative in Europe and where homosexuality was illegal until 1995. Mr Berisha acknowledged the proposed law might provoke debate but maintained that discrimination in modern Albania had to end. The bill was drawn up by a group of non-governmental organisations. It has been accepted by Mr Berisha's Democratic Party and will now come before parliament in the autumn."* (Lowen, BBC report, online 30 July 2009).

So, according to Lowen, in a predominantly Muslim country with almost no open homosexual community, the announcement by a conservative PM has taken people by surprise. This surprise comes to attention even though when Goran Miletic, a Belgrade-based human rights lawyer, working

<sup>3</sup> Since 1995 it has been legal to be homosexual in Albania, read more in Masters, T. (2007). *Eastern Europe*. London: Lonely Planet. p. 69. Article 137 of the criminal code of communist Albania provided for up to 10 years of prison for simply "being homosexual". In the summer of 1994, the postcommunist government put forth a draft penal code under which homosexuality would have remained illegal, but with the maximum sentence reduced in three years. A campaign initiated by Gay Albania Society, with substantial help from the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) and the Council of Europe led to the withdrawal of this draft, and homosexuality was accordingly decriminalised by the Albanian parliament on 20 January 1995. In August 2009, the government introduced a bill in parliament to allow gay marriage. Read more in Elsie, R. (2010) *Historical Dictionary of Albania*. Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, p. 157.

partly on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues said it was an important step forward for the country. According to him “(It is) encouraging for the LGBT community in Albania, bearing in mind that they are not visible compared to some other Balkan states like Serbia, like Macedonia or Croatia” (Miletic, interview BBC, online 30 July 2009).

However the reaction in Albania came from different points of view. The reaction by Islamic and Catholic leaders has been vehement. Under the isolationist rule of Enver Hoxha, Albania was officially an atheist state and still the most fanatic outcries against this case were from the ex-communists Albanians. But since the fall of Communism almost two decades ago, religion has once again grown and its leaders' voices are influential. For about half a century the history has been forgotten and experiences have been told from one point of view, from the communist moral, leaving a huge gap in the human rights issues. There was a most significant and unpleasant attack on homosexuality in general, a concept now becoming articulated: what Weeks calls the ‘construction of homosexuality’, the invention of an interdicted category (Weeks, 1996: 41). For Weeks in our culture ‘homosexuality has become an excoriated experience’ and even today ‘largely unfortunate’ (Weeks, 1996: 42). In similar way Adam condemns that the very ‘term of *homosexuality* is of course, problematic’ (Adam, 1996: 123). Robert Elsie in study *A Dictionary of Albanian Religion, Mythology and Folk Culture* explains that homosexuality is still much ‘taboo subject’ in Albania, especially after fifty years communist rule under Enver Hoxha, who, ‘ironically, is widely known to have engaged in homosexual relations himself in his younger years’ (Elsie, 2001: 116).

During the communism in Albania were banned everything in art, literary work and even in translation from other famous authors that consider the theme of homosexuality or other related issues of gender and sexuality. During these years were added among others to the index of banned books: Andon Zako Çajupi’s<sup>4</sup> poem *Elegy in Old Age for the Time of Boyhood* (*Elegji në pleqëri për moshën e djalërisë*) (1902) and translated works of James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1923), and many more well-known authors of the time.

Related to these facts the gay men in Albania are in fear for their life, if they openly declare their sexual tendencies. Looking to all the facts found during the research, it has to be said that a homosexual would be at risk of losing his life or of at least receiving an inhumane and degrading treatment if he was recognised as being openly gay in Albania.

Thinking about homosexual relationship and homosexuals and marriages of the same sex in Albania takes place against a political background, and it may be as well to begin by saying what I take this to be. Anyone with broadly liberal sympathies writing on this topic in the twenty years of the transition in Albania, say, when political rivalries among the leading Albanian mentalities and traditions drove them apparently inexorably towards a savage and pointless war, would properly have been arguing against the excesses of this case. This is not our predicament. At least within the liberal democracies, we are living at a time when individual human rights are attacked from several directions at once. They are challenged from inside by culturalism, tradition, religion and sexual identities at odds with

<sup>4</sup> Andon Zako Çajupi (1866-1930), a leading Albanian poet and playwright of the nationalist era, had his poem banned during the communist regime in Albania because it was seen as a ‘masculine’ tool for the oppression of woman. His poem *Elegy in Old Age for the Time of Boyhood* (*Elegji në pleqëri për moshën e djalërisë*), was banned because in it the ‘balance’ (*kandari*); is described as an element of the male Phallus:

‘Oh sweet wife, your comfort's dead -  
can't even raise his wrinkled head,  
who was rampant night and day:  
a stallion eager for the fray.

Grua seç mu prish kandari  
Nuk është më ai i pari  
Që s’përtonte ditë e natë  
Ndizej si barut i thatë. (Translated from the original in Albanian)

what are seen as the homogenising features of nationality, the increasingly assertive proclamation of private and self.

Looking in the past and comparing with the present situation in Albania these differences are being eroded by cultural convergence among intellectuals, analysts, journalists and many liberal opportunists and politicians from the leftist side. So the citizens of Albania do not appear to face a revival of narrow and exclusive attacks. The likelihood is rather that people will become increasingly uncertain about what homosexual relationship and homosexual means to them, and less likely to see it as a debate of ethical ties binding them to a particular place and position.

## CONCLUSION

Essentially, the above practices have been calling for a law grounded in the cultural-historical processes which it seeks to represent. But in grounding in the cultural dynamics of the Kadare's text deserves a special category, because homosexuals are part of culture and its greatest contribution can be in the realm of culture and rights of people.

Gender issues are characterised by their intimacy and familiarity with culture both in the traditional sense of Albanian identity (e.g. clothing, folk songs, the Canon, literature) and in broader sense of the word (the nuances of everyday behaviour). Further, Kadare's *Beauty Pageant for Men in The Accursed Mountains* explores how memory culture devices are a product of political struggle. History has shown that one of the first things which powers attempt to control, in parallel with human rights, is culture, where values and beliefs and identities are forged and reformed. Yet Kadare's novel is not simple parochial defence of indigenous culture, it is attention to gender relations and its travel situation under the power of cross cultural clothing.

Here Kadare's text get ahead and hints borders with cultural mnemonic devices and its master-concept of hybridity. Kadare's novel is a fictitious text that as the later it has involved intellectuals in concrete political struggles where their lives and freedom have often been at risk.

*Beauty Pageant for Men in The Accursed Mountains* displays a considerable understanding around the importance of cultural memory devices as one front and an important front in the wider political struggle for gender identity construction. The novel is powerful enough to shape gender identities and provokes a great deal of disturbance while its popularity is spreading.

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